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1. (currently amended) An image recording apparatus comprising:

a first converting unit for converting image data into primary data having an N-bit range according to a first gradation conversion characteristic;

a second converting unit for converting the image data into secondary data having an M-bit range according to a second gradation conversion characteristic that is lower in the degree of level compression than the first gradation conversion characteristic or that causes no level compression, where M is greater than N;

a correlation calculating unit for calculating data that determines correlation between the primary data and the secondary data, the calculated data including level information in the secondary data which was lost in the primary data, and employing the calculated data as tertiary data; and

a recording unit for recording the primary data and the tertiary data in a file.

2. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the recording unit records the primary data in an image storage segment to be preferentially referred to, which is in the file.

3. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 2, wherein the recording unit records the tertiary data in an application segment optionally able to be added, which is in the file.

4. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the first gradation conversion characteristic and the second gradation conversion characteristic have the same

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characteristic curve in at least a part of an entire input signal range.

5. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the correlation calculating unit calculates data relating to dissimilarity between the primary data and the secondary data and employs the calculated data as the tertiary data.

6. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the recording unit compresses the tertiary data by nonlinearly quantizing it and records the compressed tertiary data in the file.

7. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the recording unit compresses the tertiary data by increasing a sampling increment of the tertiary data on an image space and records the compressed tertiary data in the file.

8. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the recording unit discriminates non-correlation regions that are image areas where a substantial dissimilarity exists between the primary data and the secondary data, and records the tertiary data in the file in a manner that the tertiary data is divided into map data indicating shapes of the non-correlation regions and data indicating values of the non-correlation regions.

9. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the recording unit discriminates a non-coincidence position that is a position in an image where the secondary data cannot be calculated directly from the primary data, and records the tertiary data at the non-coincidence position in the file.

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10. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the recording unit compresses the tertiary data by run-length coding, entropy coding, and/or predictive coding, and records the compressed tertiary data in the file.

11. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the second converting unit changes the second gradation conversion characteristic in accordance with a feature of the image data.

12. (currently amended) An image recording apparatus comprising:

a first converting unit for converting image data into primary data having an N-bit range according to a first gradation conversion characteristic;

a second converting unit for converting the image data into secondary data having an M-bit range according to a second gradation conversion characteristic that is lower in the degree of level compression than the first gradation conversion characteristic or that causes no level compression, where M is greater than N;

a correlation calculating unit for calculating data that determines correlation between the primary data and the secondary data, the calculated data including level information in the secondary data which was lost in the primary data, and employing the calculated data as tertiary data; and

a recording unit for recording the primary data and the tertiary data in a file, wherein

said recording unit is a unit for irreversibly compressing the primary data and recording the irreversibly compressed primary data, and

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said correlation calculating unit is a unit for expanding the irreversibly compressed primary data, calculating data that determines correlation between the expanded primary data and the secondary data, and employing the calculated data as the tertiary data.

13. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the recording unit records the primary data in an image storage segment to be preferentially referred to, which is in the file.

14. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the recording unit records the tertiary data in an application segment optionally able to be added, which is in the file.

15. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the first gradation conversion characteristic and the second gradation conversion characteristic have the same characteristic curve in at least a part of an entire input signal range.

16. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the correlation calculating unit calculates data relating to dissimilarity between the primary data and the secondary data and employs the calculated data as the tertiary data.

17. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the recording unit compresses the tertiary data by nonlinearly quantizing it and records the compressed tertiary data in the file.

18. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the recording unit compresses the tertiary data by increasing a sampling increment of the tertiary data on

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an image space and records the compressed tertiary data in the file.

19. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the recording unit discriminates non-correlation regions that are image areas where a substantial dissimilarity exists between the primary data and the secondary data, and records the tertiary data in the file in a manner that the tertiary data is divided into map data indicating shapes of the non-correlation regions and data indicating values of the non-correlation regions.

20. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the recording unit discriminates a non-coincidence position that is a position in an image where the secondary data cannot be calculated directly from the primary data, and records the tertiary data at the non-coincidence position in the file.

21. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the recording unit compresses the tertiary data by run-length coding, entropy coding, and/or predictive coding, and records the compressed tertiary data in the file.

22. (original) The image recording apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the second converting unit changes the second gradation conversion characteristic in accordance with a feature of the image data.

23. (currently amended) A recording medium on which an image processing program is recorded, the image processing program comprising the steps of:

converting image data into primary data having an N-bit range according to a first gradation conversion characteristic;

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converting the image data into secondary data having an M-bit range according to a second gradation conversion characteristic that is lower in the degree of level compression than the first gradation conversion characteristic or that causes no level compression, where M is greater than N;

calculating data that determines correlation between the primary data and the secondary data, the calculated data including level information in the secondary data which was lost in the primary data, and employing the calculated data as tertiary data; and

recording the primary data and the tertiary data in a file.

24. (original) A recording medium according to claim 23, wherein the image processing program further comprises the steps of:

recording the primary data by irreversibly converting it; and

expanding the irreversibly compressed primary data, and calculating data that determines correlation between the expanded primary data and the secondary data, and employing the calculated data as the tertiary data.

25. (currently amended) An image recording method comprising the steps of:

converting image data into primary data having an N-bit range according to a first gradation conversion characteristic;

converting the image data into secondary data having an M-bit range according to a second gradation conversion characteristic that is lower in the degree of level compression than the first gradation conversion characteristic or that causes no level compression, where M is greater than N;

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calculating data that determines correlation between the primary data and the secondary data, the calculated data including level information in the secondary data which was lost in the primary data, and employing the calculated data as tertiary data; and

recording the primary data and the tertiary data in a file.

26. (original) The image recording method according to claim 25, further comprising the steps of:

recording the primary data by irreversibly converting it; and

expanding the irreversibly compressed primary data, and calculating data that determines correlation between the expanded primary data and the secondary data, and employing the calculated data as the tertiary data.

27. (original) An image reproducing apparatus for reproducing a file generated by an image recording apparatus, the image recording apparatus having: a first converting unit for converting image data into primary data having an N-bit range according to a first gradation conversion characteristic; a second converting unit for converting the image data into secondary data having an M-bit range according to a second gradation conversion characteristic that is lower in the degree of level compression than the first gradation conversion characteristic or that causes no level compression, where M is greater than N; a correlation calculating unit for calculating data that determines correlation between the primary data and the secondary data and employing the calculated data as tertiary data; and a recording unit for recording the primary data and the tertiary data in the file, comprising:

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a reading unit for reading the primary data and the tertiary data from the file; and

a secondary data calculating unit for reproducing the secondary data based on the primary data and the tertiary data.

28. (original) The image reproducing apparatus according to claim 27, wherein the secondary data calculating unit level-compresses the secondary data so that the data has a bit range gradation-reproducible by an external apparatus, and outputs the level-compressed data.

29. (original) An image reproducing apparatus for reproducing a file generated by an image recording apparatus, having: a first converting unit for converting image data into primary data having an N-bit range according to a first gradation conversion characteristic; a second converting unit for converting the image data into secondary data having an M-bit range according to a second gradation conversion characteristic that is lower in the degree of level compression than the first gradation conversion characteristic or that causes no level compression, where M is greater than N; a correlation calculating unit for calculating data that determines correlation between the primary data and the secondary data and employing the calculated data as tertiary data; and a recording unit for discriminating a non-coincidence position that is a position in an image where the secondary data cannot be calculated directly from the primary data and for recording the primary data and the tertiary data at the non-coincidence position in the file, comprising:

a reading unit for reading the primary data and the tertiary data from the file; and

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a secondary data calculating unit for reproducing the secondary data based on the primary data and the tertiary data, wherein

said secondary data calculating unit discriminates the non-coincidence positions according to pixel values of the primary data, disposes the tertiary data at the non-coincidence positions and performing positioning between the primary data and the tertiary data, and reproduces the secondary data based on the primary data and the tertiary data that corresponds to the primary data in pixel position.

30. (original) A recording medium on which an image processing program is recorded, for reproducing a file generated by an image recording apparatus, the image recording apparatus having: a first converting unit for converting image data into primary data having an N-bit range according to a first gradation conversion characteristic second converting unit for converting the image data into secondary data having an M-bit range according to a second gradation conversion characteristic that is lower in the degree of level compression than the first gradation conversion characteristic or that causes no level compression, where M is greater than N; a correlation calculating unit for calculating data that determines correlation between the primary data and the secondary data and employing the calculated data as tertiary data; and a recording unit for recording the primary data and the tertiary data in the file, comprising the steps of:

reading the primary data and the tertiary data from the file; and

reproducing the secondary data based on the primary data and the tertiary data.

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31. (original) A recording medium on which an image processing program is recorded, for reproducing a file generated by an image recording apparatus, having: a first converting unit for converting image data into primary data having an N-bit range according to a first gradation conversion characteristic; a second converting unit for converting the image data into secondary data having an M-bit range according to a second gradation conversion characteristic that is lower in the degree of level compression than the first gradation conversion characteristic or that causes no level compression, where M is greater than N; a correlation calculating unit for calculating data that determines correlation between the primary data and the secondary data and employing the calculated data as tertiary data; and a recording unit for discriminating a non-coincidence position that is a position in an image where the secondary data cannot be calculated directly from the primary data and for recording the primary data and the tertiary data at the non-coincidence position in the file, comprising the steps of:

reading the primary data and the tertiary data from the file; and

reproducing the secondary data based on the primary data and the tertiary data, wherein

said reproducing discriminates the non-coincidence positions according to pixel values of the primary data, disposes the tertiary data at the non-coincidence positions and performing positioning between the primary data and the tertiary data, and reproduces the secondary data based on the primary data and the tertiary data that corresponds to the primary data in pixel position.

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32. (original) An image reproducing method for reproducing a file generated by an image recording apparatus, having: a first converting unit for converting image data into primary data having an N-bit range according to a first gradation conversion characteristic; a second converting unit for converting the image data into secondary data having an M-bit range according to a second gradation conversion characteristic that is lower in the degree of level compression than the first gradation conversion characteristic or that causes no level compression, where M is greater than N; a correlation calculating unit for calculating data that determines correlation between the primary data and the secondary data and employing the calculated data as tertiary data; and a recording unit for recording the primary data and the tertiary data in the file, comprising the steps of:

reading the primary data and the tertiary data from the file; and

reproducing the secondary data based on the primary data and the tertiary data.

33. (original) An image reproducing method for reproducing a file generated by an image recording apparatus, having: a first converting unit for converting image data into primary data having an N-bit range according to a first gradation conversion characteristic; a second converting unit for converting the image data into secondary data having an M-bit range according to a second gradation conversion characteristic that is lower in the degree of level compression than the first gradation conversion characteristic or that causes no level compression, where M is greater than N; a correlation calculating unit for calculating data that

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determines correlation between the primary data and the secondary data and employing the calculated data as tertiary data; and a recording unit for discriminating a non-coincidence position that is a position in an image where the secondary data cannot be calculated directly from the primary data and for recording the primary data and the tertiary data at the non-coincidence position in the file, comprising the steps of:

reading the primary data and the tertiary data from the file; and

reproducing the secondary data based on the primary data and the tertiary data, wherein

said reproducing discriminates the non-coincidence positions according to pixel values of the primary data, disposes the tertiary data at the non-coincidence positions and performing positioning between the primary data and the tertiary data, and reproduces the secondary data based on the primary data and the tertiary data that corresponds to the primary data in pixel position.

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